

The Power of literature and Sustenance of Human Dignity in the 21st Century: a Study of Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*

Dr. Chinyere T. Ojiakor¹, Dr. Aloy Nnamdi Obika²

Department of English, Madonna University Nigeria, Okija Campus, Anambra State.

Email: tcorjiakor@gmail.com

Department of English, Madonna University Nigeria, Okija Campus, Anambra State

Email: aloyobika@yahoo.com

Abstract— *The article deals with the treatment of human dignity in El Saadawi's Woman at Point Zero. We begin with an extended methodological and conceptual exploration, asking what should be taken as primary in examining human dignity. Noting a particularly close relationship between contemporary uses of human dignity, international law, and human rights, this connection is treated as focal without assuming that it is definitive of the concept. The use of human dignity in public international law is a marker for understanding the moral, legal and political discourse of human dignity. A characteristic expression is found in the Preamble of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) whose rights "derive from the inherent dignity of the human person" and whose animating principle is "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family [as] the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world." This assertion and others like it form a common reference point in contemporary literature on human dignity. Importantly, this 'inherent dignity' represents a potential bridge between a number of different ideas and ideals, namely freedom, justice and peace. Literature has a unique capacity to touch the hearts and minds and engage readers in a way that is distinctly different from political or academic texts. This paper argues for a rich understanding of human dignity, an understanding that cannot be reduced to rigid principles. Cultural forms, imagination, and fantasy employed in Saadawi's Woman at Point Zero allow us to see this richness.*

Keywords— *Power, Literature, Human Dignity, Century and El Sadaawi.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past years, debates about human rights of which human dignity is the most important from which all other fundamental rights derive, have assumed an increasingly prominent place in postcolonial literature and theory. Human dignity can denote the special elevation of human

species, the special potentiality associated with rational humanity, or the basic entitlements of each individual. There is always an immediate recognition to the word and its importance, but when one is asked to define it or say what it looks like to have one's dignity honoured, the common response offered is that dignity is about respect. To the contrary, dignity is not the same as respect. Respect, on the other hand, is earned through one's actions. Dignity is our inherent value and worth as human beings; everyone is born with it. Everyone recognizes that we all have a deep, human desire to be treated as something of value. I believe that it is our highest common denominator. This shared desire for dignity transcends all of our differences, putting our common human identity above all else. While our uniqueness is important, history has shown us that if we don't take the next step toward recognizing our shared identity, conflicts in our workplace, our personal lives, and between nations will continue to abound. Regard for dignity has the potential to change the world, but only if people help to spread its profound message. This is where literature and literary artists come in. This article is based on the concept of Engaged Literature that was articulated by the French writer and philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. In his book *What is literature?* Sartre argues that intellectuals and the ordinary citizens must take a stand, especially with regard to major political conflicts. Sartre hoped that literature would serve as a means to enable oppressed minority groups gain recognition and that members of the elites would be moved to action as a result of the influence of literature. He argued that should a novel end with a call for action, it has to consciously address groups that have the power to act. Sartre offers a double function for literature, acting as both a mirror for the oppressor and as also as a source of inspiration and guidance for the oppressed. As a moral concept, human rights/dignity literature deals directly or indirectly with human rights and leads its readers to understand and act to protect human dignity. It is hard to imagine a viable

approach to social justice today that does not rely on the language of human dignity. The proliferation of the many norms and ideals associated with human rights no doubt represents a hallmark achievement in international law, at the same time as it exemplifies the salutary repercussions of globalization. The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have, in turn, come to be widely touted as the era of human rights—a sentiment that captures both the growing preponderance of rights talk and the immense promise that it invariably carries.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Writers from Salman Rushdie to Nawal El Saadawi have used the novel to explore both the possibilities and challenges of enacting and protecting human dignity, particularly in the Global South. In *Fictions of Dignity*, Elizabeth S. Anker shows how the dual enabling fictions of human dignity and bodily integrity contribute to an anxiety about the body that helps to explain many of the contemporary and historical failures of human rights, revealing why and how lives are excluded from human rights/dignity protections along the lines of race, gender, class, disability, and species membership. In the process, Anker examines the vital work performed by a particular kind of narrative imagination in fostering respect for human rights. Drawing on phenomenology, Anker suggests how an embodied politics of reading might restore a vital fleshiness to the overly abstract, decorporealized subject of liberal rights. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* addresses the obstacles to incorporating rights into a formerly colonized nation's legal culture. El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* takes up controversies over women's freedoms in Islamic society. In *Disgrace*, J. M. Coetzee considers the disappointments of post-apartheid reconciliation in South Africa. And in *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy confronts an array of human rights abuses widespread in contemporary India. Each of these literary case studies further demonstrates the relevance of embodiment to both comprehending and redressing the failures of human rights. Human right literature does not believe writing is solely an artistic aesthetic exercise, and calls on writers to realize the social commitment under the power of their literary creation, that its effects on the public is enormous and does come to fruition often.

Sartre argued that "the reader of the novel submits to the book before him, abandoning his worldly existence to assume a vicarious one while he reads. He lives the problem which he himself helps to create, placing himself in the most sympathetic position in relation to what the writer wishes to say" (23). Marina Nemat, author of "Prisoner of Teheran" and the winner of the first European Parliament 'Human Dignity' award explains:

"Literature allows the victim to become a survivor and stand up to the past to ensure a better future. It is literature that carries the human experience, reaches our hearts, and makes us feel the pain of those who have been treated unjustly. Without literature and narrative, we would lose our identities as human beings and will dissolve in the darkness of time and our repeated mistakes that lead us from one preventable devastation to the next" (web). Hence, literature that serves for the sustenance of human dignity should emphasize the responsibility of the author to delve into writing that is not deliberately isolated from the world and geopolitical events, and regional or global social crises. This genre of literature does not believe in writing for purely aesthetic purposes. It calls on writers to exercise their moral-social duty wherein the power of the literary creation on the public is enormous and rarely come to fruition. Professor Martha Nussbaum in her book: *Poetic Justice* argues that social sympathy is a necessary condition for equitable treatment in courts of law. Judges, Nussbaum has observed, are short of imaginative data about the persons they must judge, and novels are one place they can look for guidance. In her essay "The Tremendous Power of Literature" Vered Cohen Barzilay writes: "Literature can be as powerful as life itself. It can be like our prophecy. It can inspire us to change our world and give us the comfort, hope, passion and strength that we need in order to fight to create a better future for us, as well as all humanity. We just need to keep on reading and to allow the tremendous power of literature to enter our hearts and lead us to our own path" (web). Indeed, Human dignity Literature does not impose on the authors actual call for action, rather, the writer's task ends as soon as he completes the writing process. Only the readers' response can answer whether the creation inspires social change or motivates for action.

El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* in Seeking for a Continuous Dialogue in the 21st Century

Many authors suffer persecution as authorities recognize their unique power and ability to impact on the masses. Foremost is Salman Rushdie, he became a target following the publication of his *Satanic Verses* (1988). The book was the centre of a major controversy in the Islamic world because of what was perceived as an irreverent depiction of Muhammad. Death threats were made against him, including a fatwā issued by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the Supreme Leader of Iran, on 14 February 1989 and a bounty was offered for Rushdie's death. Rushdie was forced to hide and live under police protection for many years. Years later Rushdie became the president of PEN International, the worldwide association of writers who fights for freedom of expression, and acts as a powerful voice on behalf of

writers harassed, imprisoned and sometimes killed for their views.

This article, literary case, studies El Sadaawi, a writer who has shown a deep concern about certain subjugating conditions that women undergo. *Woman at Point Zero* is one of El Saadawi's most controversial writings. The book is an allegory for women's struggle against patriarchy and colonial power in Egypt, an allegory narrated through the life-history of Firdaus, an Egyptian woman convicted for murder and awaiting for execution. El Saadawi met Firdaus "in the Qanatir Prison, a few years ago" (3), when the author was doing a research on the personalities of women prisoners and detainees convicted for various offenses. The prison doctor asked El Saadawi to interview Firdaus several times, but Firdaus had always refused. Firdaus didn't want to meet anybody, especially "one of them", an individual related to the repressive authorities implicated in her conviction. El Saadawi had "given up all hope to meet her" (4), when one day, as she was leaving the prison, the warder warned her that Firdaus wanted to see her. Firdaus had been "sentenced to death for killing a man", he said. But she is "not like the other murderesses held in the prison," "You will never meet anyone like her in or out of prison" (6).

Set against the backdrop of a patriarchal society, Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* is the saga of the stoic protagonist, Firdaus who, through her life-journey, grasps the dynamics of the exploitive patriarchal system and eventually confronts in the words of Diana Royer, "the multiple manifestations of her culture- punishing masculinities" (292). Women across the globe face the discrimination based on gender which not only leaves a physical scar on their bodies but a mental scar as well which is hard to erase. Women have long realised their importance and they have been fighting for their dignity from long back and it is still prevalent as it has not been achieved yet. The discrimination against women is an old story now and it differs from country to country. Emma Watson, a well-known English actress in her UN speech initiated a new step by launching a campaign known as He or She campaign as according to her it is important to include men for the fight of women emancipation. This wave of feminism is prevalent across the world including the Third World countries as well. Nawal El Saadawi in her book *Woman at Point Zero* beautifully portrays the condition of Egyptian women particularly Firdaus who is the main protagonist of the novel. This novel is based on a true event where Nawal met Firdaus in a jail, a criminal and was soon to be hanged for the murder which she has committed. The interesting thing was that Firdaus was not appealing for life time imprisonment instead of death penalty and demanded death. Nawal got very curious to know about her life and finally Firdaus narrated her whole

life story which was full of sufferings and struggle done to her by the men in her life and the society.

Actually Firdaus was tired of this male dominated society and death was the only source of emancipation for her. The female child faces the problem of discrimination and inhumanity treatments as soon as she is born because a male child is usually the preferred sex. Advancement in technology has made it possible for the prejudice to start right from the womb. This is in spite of Gloria Chukwukere's attestation that, "modernisation has weakened bonds and emancipated the African woman giving her some powers, choices and initiatives....As a result of her expanding commercial activity, she has become less dependent on the male members of her family" (3). Firdaus' body has been dehumanized early in her childhood through the process of circumcision at the hands of her mother. Any link with her mother has been cut, no other ties can bring them together and this leads Firdaus' life into a different detour in which she starts to depend on herself as a separate being. This single act leaves a devastating in her life. Later in her life, she is unable to experience sexual pleasure because according to her, "a part of me, of my being, was gone and would never return" (15). The males she encounters all looted her subjectivity and did not give her a chance to live as a normal subject, all consider her as an object which should be exploited to the bone. That is why she expresses her strong desire to re-unite with her mother to compensate herself and feel the warmth she used to have before, to feel secure as she was because in the patriarchal society she is a target all the time where men are competing to hurt her. As a child, Firdaus' uncle uses any opportunity he has to exploit her sexually. While she is kneading dough to bake for family use, her uncle, under the guise of reading a book, rubs her thighs and gradually moves upwards to her private part. He only stops when he hears a sound or movement and „would continue to press against my thighs with a grasping almost brutal insistence" (13) when silence is restored to the environment.

Child marriages are common place in Africa. This practice enables the girl's family to get rid of her because she is regarded as an unnecessary liability. At the tender age of eighteen, Firdaus is forcefully married off to Sheik Mahmoud, a sixty-year old rich widower, by her uncle. This arrangement is masterminded by her uncle's wife who complains that "the house is too small and life is expensive, She eats twice as much as any of our children" (35). This is in spite of Firdaus' obvious importance to the house in assisting with the daily domestic chores. Although she runs from the house when she overhears this plan, she returns home to be married to Sheik Mahmoud when she discovers that the society she belongs

to does not have a safe haven for children who lack parental love, care, and security, and whose human rights are violated. She later suffers physical, emotional and verbal abuse in her marriage.

Firdaus was also deprived of education initially and the shocking part is that she got education only when her parents died. Once she asked her uncle to take her along with him to Cairo. He asked her what she will do there and when she replied that she will study in the university, to which her uncle laughed and said, "University is only for men" (14-5). This is what males do to females making them feel that they are inferior. Firdaus got her education after the death of her parents when her uncle took her with him to Cairo and she even passed her secondary education. She stood second in the school and eighth in the state in her secondary school examination but the irony was that nobody was there for her. She wanted to continue her education and wanted to achieve her dream of going to university but her uncle's wife stopped her education and wanted her to get married as soon as possible. "Woman is another woman's greatest enemy" (896) a common phrase according to Sundus Quyum, her aunt proves. Marriage in these countries is a business which let a girl's parent or guardian to earn money.

Domestic violence is the most burning topics which are prevalent in almost all parts of the world, In a report entitled "Spousal Violence in Egypt", Ibahim, Kharboush et al in *Population Reference Bureau* explored the conditions in which the Egyptian women suffer this domestic violence done to them by their spouses. This report defines the concept of 'domestic violence' according to the UN as, "Any act of gender based violence that result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" (2). This report argued that one third of Egyptian woman face this domestic violence, according to the 2005 Egypt Demographic and Health Survey. Firdaus "father always beats her mother. She observes that this is one of the „very few things“ he knows in life, that is, „how to beat his wife and make her bite the dust each night" (12). Research has shown that children that grow up in abusive environments most times end up in an abusive relationship. Firdaus grows up in a family where the father dictates to his family members and maltreats his wife daily. It is therefore no wonder that Firdaus ends up in a violent relationship with Sheik Mahmoud, her husband. Firdaus' sexual relationship with her husband is rather one of torment. At a very tender age, she is forced to marry an old man and goes through humiliating experiences. After Firdaus suffers a brutal beating in the

hands of Shiek Mahmoud, her husband, she runs to her uncle for solace:

But my uncle told me that all husbands beat their wives, and my uncle's wife added that her husband often beat her" (46) and brings her back immediately. The next day, her husband stops her from eating and says he is the only one that can put up with her and feed her — since her family has rejected her and sees her as a burden-yet she avoids him for obvious reasons. He later leapt on like a mad dog. The hole on his swelling oozing drops of foul smelling pus. I did not turn my face or my nose away this time. I surrendered my face to his face and my body to his body, passively, without any resistance, without a movement, as though life had been drained out of it (45).

Firdaus endures this marital rape called sex instead of enjoying it because these men see sexual pleasure as their sole right. She says, He got into the habit of beating me whether he had a reason for it or not. On one occasion he hit all over me with his shoe. My face and body became swollen and bruised... One day, he hit me with a heavy stick until the blood ran from my nose and ears. So I left, but this time I did not go to my uncle's house, I walked through the streets with swollen eyes and a bruised face (47). After Firdaus escapes to the streets from her husband's violence, she meets Bayoumi, a coffee shop owner. He initially offers to help Firdaus and shows her kindness and care. He accommodates her in his apartment and provides her basic needs. When Firdaus expresses the wish to get a job instead of sitting at home all day, this is how she expresses her agonizing experience in the hands of Bayoumi:

He jumped up and slapped me on my face... His hand was big and strong and it was the heaviest slap I had ever received on my face... The next moment he hit me with his fist in the belly until I lost consciousness immediately (51).

Despite the fact that Firdaus is raped and sexually exploited by Bayoumi, he also allows his friends to molest her sexually. In order to ensure that Firdaus does not escape from the house, Bayoumi locks her in the room until he returns from his coffee shop. A neighbour helps her to escape by calling a carpenter to break the door. While on the streets, she meets Sharifa Salah el Dine, an old professional prostitute, and is introduced to prostitution. In spite of being a prostitute, Firdaus is sexually abused by men from all walks of life. Indeed. Her experience is such that she never used to leave the house:

In fact I never even left the bedroom. Day and night I lay on the bed, crucified, and every hour a man would come in. There were so many of them. I could not understand where they could possibly have come from. For they were all married, all educated, all carrying swollen leather

bags, swollen leather wallets in their pockets. They dug their long nails into my flesh and I would close my lips tightly trying to stifle any expression of pain, to hold back a scream (57).

She endures this torture daily until she decides to run away. On a bench on the banks of the River Nile, a woman approached her. Sharifa actually made her a high class prostitute and Firdaus also didn't resist to it as she got enchanted with money and the comfort which Sharifa showed her. But in reality Sharifa was also using her only for the money which she realised when she overheard the conversation between Sharifa and one of her clients, Fawzy. Although Firdaus resorts to prostitution in order to free herself from man's control and sexual exploitation, Chukwuma agrees that, "in both institutions, marriage and prostitution, man is still dominant, the difference being that in the latter only, the female calls the tune"(2).

Kind and good-natured women turn to heartless and cruel ones when abused often. Sharifa's sad experiences of molestation from men make her decide to be hard-hearted. She says "my skin is soft, but my heart is cruel and my bite is deadly, like a snake" (54). Women are known to be caring, kind-hearted, loving, gentle and tender but unfavourable and oppressive situations can change them. This is not a good omen for our society since women are the ones who bring forth children to the world and nurse them. It is obvious that these women are transformed into "twisted ribs" (42) because of oppression in the patriarchal society.

One day again destiny played its role and her friend Di'aa, a journalist told her that she was not a respectable woman. This affected her so much that she was hurt deep inside and now her new aim in life was to be a respectable woman. She left this prostitution and applied for a job with her secondary school certificate and finally she got one and lived in a very small apartment just to earn respect. During her job she realised the condition of employed women was very bad. They were always chased by the men and the worst part was that they were given very low wages even though doing the same amount of work. When Firdaus, first leaves prostitution and starts working in a company, some of the men in the company desire to sleep with her. The other female workers succumb to the pressures from the men in order to gain favours. Firdaus refuses to give in to their demands because of her determination to protect her self-esteem and to live a decent and honourable life. Because of her commitment to keeping her honour and integrity:

Word went round that I was a honourable woman, a highly respected official, in fact the most honourable, and the most highly considered of all the female officials in the company. It was also said that none of the men had succeeded in breaking my pride and that not a single high-

ranking official had been able to make me bow my head, or lower my head to the ground (76).

The only man she falls in love with — Ibrahim — deceives her and gets engaged to his boss's daughter. She discovers that she is vulnerable in a society where everyone exploits her because she is a woman. She feels lonely and rejected in the patriarchal society. Now she gave up the idea of being a respectable woman and started her profession of prostitution again. This was the time when she realised that prostitution was better than being a wife as wife was doing sex with the permit of marriage. She is always enslaved and cannot do anything on her own. At least prostitutes have their own lives and decided what she wants. She again became a very successful prostitute and lived her life according to her wish. But a woman can never live successfully in the society and the same happened to her also.

Even as a prostitute, Marzouk, a pimp, threatens Firdaus. He tells her that „every prostitute has a pimp to protect her from other pimps, and from the police....You cannot do without protection, otherwise the profession exercised by husbands and pimps would die out... I may be obliged to threaten" (92) Firdaus:

Thought I had escaped from men but the man who came this time practiced a well known male profession. He was a pimp. I thought I could buy him off with a sum of money, the way I did with the police. But he refused the money and insisted on sharing my earnings. I went to the police only to discover that he had more connections than I. Then I had recourse to legal proceedings, I found out that the law punishes women like me, but turns a blind eye to what men do (92).

After Firdaus tries to protect herself without success, she agrees to share her earnings with Marzouk and he takes the larger share. Firdaus discovers further that:

he was a dangerous pimp who controlled a number of prostitutes, and I was one of them. He had friends everywhere, and in all professions, on whom he spent his money generously. He had a doctor friend to whom he had recourse if one of the prostitutes became pregnant and needed an abortion, a friend in the police who protected him from raids, a friend in the courts who used his knowledge and position to keep him out of trouble and release any of the prostitutes who found herself in goal, so that she was not held up from earning money for too long. I realized that I was not nearly as free as I had hitherto imagined myself to be. I was nothing but a body machine working day and night so that a number of men belonging to different professions could become immensely rich at my expense. I was no longer even mistress of the house for which I had paid with my sweat (92).

Marzouk started earning more and used her only for money and one day he wanted to develop physical

intercourse with her and when she resisted, it turned into a fight and finally she murdered her with the knife. She was shocked, but at the same time she was so relaxed by killing Marzouk that she felt that she took the revenge from the men of her life who only used her. She went out and again as walking alone on the street, attracts men, a car came and took her to a palace. He was the son of the king. He developed intercourse with her and when he paid for her services, she cut the money into pieces as if she was tearing all the money which she even earned in her life. She told him the reality that she is a murderer and he started laughing and didn't believe her. She slapped him and he got so scared of her and finally the police came and took her to the jail.

Henceforth, the killing of Marzouk "has a cathartic effect on Firdaus: such violent action was according to Coin, Firdaus' first action as a 'conscious subject'" (). This act of murder represents the emancipation of Firdaus which allows her to construct her subjectivity. She encountered the problem of self-definition and was an object most of her life. Thus, her destruction of Marzouk and the money she earns from the prince she slept with later empowered her to react against the motives of hysteria, exploitation, and suffering and liberated herself through abjection which leads to her actualization.

These acts enable her to know the feeling of power and subjectivity. She feels she is: destroying all the men [she] had ever known, one after the other in a row" referring to her uncle, father, husband, Bayoumi, Di'aaMarzouk and "tearing them to pieces one after the other ridding myself of them once and for all, removing every trace their piastres had left on my fingers, tearing away all flesh of my fingers to leave nothing but bone, ensuring that not a single vestige of these men would remain at all (107-8).

Women are deceived to succumb to traditional blackmail that, "A virtuous woman was not supposed to complain about her husband. Her duty was perfect obedience" (44). Women are taught to be submissive wives and dutiful mothers without the opportunity of questioning the oppressive and subjugating acts of the men. These constraints make women seek opportunities to break free of these stifling relationships in an oppressive situation. Lionett states that Dikeledi in Bessie Head's "The Collector of Treasures" and Firdaus in *Woman at Point Zero* are characters:

who come to feel that they are being denied the most elementary form of recognition and visibility and are ever thus driven to murder as a result of the 'inexpressibility' and cultural invisibility of their pain and dehumanisation (211).

The notion that the girl-child is culturally invisible informs the decision of parents to deny them education. Preference is given to the male-child to her own

detriment. Firdaus is denied education because it is uncultural to operate on the same pedestal with men.

Firdaus also observes that the men who exploit the poor and oppress women invoke Allah's blessings and observe their prayers dutifully. When she goes to her uncle to complain about her husband's incessant physical abuse, he tells her that "all husbands beat their wives...it was precisely men well versed in their religion who beat their wives; the precepts of religion permitted such punishment" (44). This is an obvious misuse of religion or even its flagrant violation that such men can exploit and oppress their wives. In the Islamic society, the setting of *Woman at Point Zero*, where Firdaus finds herself, it is observed that male oppression is backed by religious authority and not frowned at by law enforcement agents. A pimp is not punished for his indecent activities but raids and arrests are carried out on prostitutes. Although these men are religious and observe their daily religious obligations, they still regard oppression and subjugation of women as a normal way of life.

Firdaus is sentenced to death by hanging for killing Marzouk, the pimp. Although she is told to appeal to the president of her country, since she committed the crime in self-defence, "she refused to sign an appeal to the President so that her sentence is commuted to life imprisonment" (1). For her, death which is a 'journey to a place unknown to everybody on this earth fills me with pride. All my life I have been searching for something that would fill me with pride, and make me feel superior to everyone else, including kings, princes and rulers' (101). In other words, she will be finally free from the clutches of male subjugation.

The most interesting part is that Firdaus narrates the story to the writer on the day of her execution when she knew that the writer cannot help her.

El Saadawi uses the evocative power of literature to inspire women to action. She uses literature to take the struggle from the street to the homes of the oppressed women, using the written word as a revolutionary tool. The vivid symbolism that emerges throughout the novel is nothing but a means to that end: an instrument to show the sources of oppression in society. Foucault argued that power becomes dominant by means of its invisibility. The main principle for power to be effective is to be "absolutely indiscreet, since it is everywhere and always alert" but "absolutely discreet, for it functions permanently and largely in silence" (177). Invisibility allows power to reproduce political oppression: when the source of power is unidentified, oppression is hard to resist. Visibility is thus a preliminary condition for power to be opposed. A visible and concentrated source of power is easy to defeat. In this context, clitoridectomy, arranged marriages, sexual exploitation and the strong

visual images that El Saadawi uses, such as the representation of her husband as a “dog”, or the description of the tumor on his lip, are tools to make power visible and recognizable to her readers. Nawal El Saadawi’s symbolic narrative is an instrument to help the reader identify the oppressive nature of patriarchy in Egypt. In the author’s intent, literature has thus a precise political function: to make power visible to isolated women and “uplift” the veil from their minds. Like the postcolonial intellectual gives voice to the silent ones and makes visible the invisible, Nawal El Saadawi uses literature as an instrument to liberate women, and inspire them to resist oppression. *Woman at Point Zero* is thus not merely a novel: it is a message of resistance for all women: a message that compels women to see that they are not alone, for in such solidarity they may find the courage to end oppression and to achieve justice and freedom for themselves and then for the whole society. Thus she posits in Tarabishi:

The challenge before women is to break this isolation and to reach women everywhere.... A social consciousness based on awareness of other women, and a desire to unite with them to acquire the capability and power necessary in the fight to end oppression, and to achieve justice and freedom for themselves and then for the whole society (21-22).

REFERENCES

- [1] Anker, Elizabeth. *Fictions of Dignity: Embodying Human Rights in World Literature*. 2012. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.chq42w5>.
- [2] Coin, Francesca. On the Condition of the Colonized Woman: the Nervous Conditions of Firdaus in Nawal El Saadawi’s *Woman at Point Zero* (1983), Giunti, Firenze 2001.EP.5 (6). Retrieved July 2, 2014, from http://www.unive.it/media/allegato/dep/Recensioni/37_Sadaawi.rtf
- [3] Chukwukere, Gloria. *Gender Voices & Choices Redefining Women in Contemporary African Fiction*. Enugu: Fouth Diemension. 1995.
- [4] El Saadawi, Nawal. *Woman at Point Zero*. London: Zed Books Ltd. 1983.
- [5] J. Tarabishi. *Woman Against Her Sex: A Critique of Nawal el-Saadawi with a Reply by Nawal el-Sadaawi*. New York: Saqi Books, 1988.
- [6] Kharboush, Ibrahim et al. “Spousal Violence in Egypt”. *Population Reference Burea 2010* Lionett, Francoise. “Geographies of Pain: Captive Bodies and Violent Acts in the Fictions of Gayl Jones, Bessie Head and Myriam Warner-Veiya” *The Politics of (M) Othering*. Ed.
- [7] Obioma Nnaemeka. London: Routeledge, 1997. 205-227.
- [8] Michel, Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, New York: Vintage Books, 1963.
- [9] Martha, Nussbaum. “Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life”. Amazon.com Retrieved 2013-12-20
- [10] Opara, Chioma. *Her Mother’s Daughter: The African Writer as a Woman*. Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press, 2004.
- [11] Quyoomb, Sundus. “Women Struggle: A Critical Analysis of *Woman at Point Zero* and *The Colour Purple*”. *International Journal of Social Sciences*. Vol 3 Issue 1,890-907. 2017.
- [12] Royer, Diana. *Critical Perspectives of the Works of Nawal El Saadawi, Egyptian Writer and Activist*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press. 2001
- [13] Vered, Barzilay. “The Tremendous Power of literature.” *The Guardian*. Retrieved 2015-02-24. Web.